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Washington 98110
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Chief, Protected Resources Division
NOAA Fisheries
525 N.E. Oregon Street
Suite 500
Portland, Oregon 97232

Dear Chief of Protected Resources:

I am writing to urge that the Orcas of Puget Sound be declared depleted under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

The Sound's Orca population has declined by one-fifth over the last seven years. Unless action is taken quickly this beloved symbol of the Northwest may soon disappear.

According to a recent article in the Post Intelligencer, the fisheries service is asking the public for ideas in order to formulate a rational approach to a conservation strategy in order that the Orcas will not become extinct.

The fate of the Orcas cannot be considered separately from the fate of the Sound. Puget Sound is a very sick ecosystem and until it is restored to health, the creatures who depend upon it for survival will be threatened. While the problems of the Sound are many, they seem to be traceable to several defined causes which can be divided into two main categories: a poisoned food supply and a lack of food due to depleted fish populations.

POISONS:

A poisoned food supply is the result of

1. the dumping of poisons into the Sound, specifically dioxin from paper mills, heavy metals from smelters, PCBs from various sources including the military, oil and grease from oil refineries such as BP and Conoco Phillips. A recent dumping of paint into the Sound by the Edgewater motel on several separate occasions illustrates that these practices are not limited to industrial sites.
2. creosote contamination caused by debris from old pilings and barges and abandoned railroad ties. According to the Post Intelligencer (11-19-2002) a recent incident has been traced to a Burlington Northern/Santa Fe railroad site.
3. runoff contamination from motor vehicles, pesticides, sewage and fertilizers

DEPLETED FISH STOCKS DUE TO HABITAT DESTRUCTION

The shady, sandy beaches that many fish eggs require are being destroyed by:

1. Bulkheads—one third of the Sound's shorelines are bulkheaded or otherwise contained which removes areas where fish can spawn
2. Lack of Vegetation—the removal of trees and vegetation from the shorelines creates dead areas where fish eggs cannot survive.
3. Overfishing—about half the Sound's fish stocks traced by state scientists are in trouble.

How can the Orcas or any other Sound species survive, let alone thrive, when their food source is depleted and what little remains is poisoned?

The remedies for this situation are clear. Laws against dumping contaminants into the Sound must be passed, they must have teeth, and they must be enforced. It is unconscionable that the BP and Conoco refineries released more than 200 pounds of organic matter containing oil and grease in a single day and it was not only legal but well within their state permit (Post Intelligencer 11-19-2002). Funds must be allocated to locate and clean up existing pockets of contamination (example: PCB deposits which are thought to be largely responsible for the Orca's decline). Public information campaigns must be implemented and vigorously pursued to alert the general public to the relationship between their lifestyles and the health of the Sound and its Orcas. Local ordinances should prescribe shoreline regulations that are Orca and fish friendly. Are there viable alternatives to bulkheads? If not, should bulkheads be an option? Again a public information campaign to encourage shoreowners to plant Orca/fish friendly beaches is worth diligently pursuing. Strict fishing limits should be instituted and enforced until fish stocks show a sustained recovery.

Nothing in this letter is a secret. It was all published recently in the November Post Intelligencer series, "Our Troubled Sound". If the fisheries service wants a guideline for action I am sure the articles in that series would provide an excellent one. I think we all know that what is missing is not the knowledge of what needs to be done, but the will to do it.

I would be willing to pay an increase in tax (sales, gas) if the money would go directly and only to restore the Sound. I would guess many others feel the same.

I can think of few things that would give me more happiness than to see once again the clouds of birds, the swarms of fish, the pods of Orcas and the pure water that once was Puget Sound. Anyone who can make this happen will have done a great thing for all generations.

Thank you for asking for my comments and for reading my letter. I hope that I have not written in vain. Much as I want to believe that something will be done to help these

animals and that this letter is a step in that effort, I cannot rid myself of the despairing feeling that if the fisheries service were sincere in its desire to protect the Orcas it would not have rejected the pleas of conservationists to protect them under the Endangered Species Act.

Sincerely,

Abigail Nazareth

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